

Mr G
R E P L Y

TO THE
S T R I C T U R E S
O F

MR. J. S. a L A Y M A N,

U P O N T H E P A M P H L E T
E N T I T L E D

O B S E R V A T I O N S

U P O N T H E
P R E S E N T S T A T E

O F T H E
C L E R G Y I N N E W - E N G L A N D, &c.

——— *Sanctus haberi*
Iustitiæque tenax, factis dictisque mereris ?
Agnosco procerem ——— *Juv. Sat. 8. v. 24.*

B Y P E T E R T H A C H E R, A. M.
A U T H O R of said P A M P H L E T.

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A R E P L Y, &c.

THE author of the Observations upon the present State of the Clergy in New-England, &c. had no idea of exciting the resentment, or injuring the reputation of his country, when he wrote that *unhappy* pamphlet : In the simplicity and integrity of his heart, he wrote a representation of the state of a deserving body of men, and made observations upon a power which is claimed by some, and which he supposed to be founded in the deepest injustice and cruellest oppression.

No man or body of men could suppose themselves to be injured by this publication, or to be charged in it, unless they were in the predicament, concerning which the observations were made. If any people were conscious to themselves that they had done justice to their minister ; if any individual had exerted himself in answering so good a purpose, he could not feel himself attacked or injured in that publication.

But unfortunately for the author, he hath aroused the feelings of one gentleman, who " declares himself to be much injured, as a citizen, by Mr. Thacher's charge," and who hath taken up the pen to vindicate his countrymen from the " high charges" which the author of the Observations had brought against them, as well as to assert their invaded rights.

The pen sometimes runs away with the head and the heart : The impulse of the moment, the spur of the occasion sometimes carries us beyond our design, but upon a re-perusal of the pamphlet so fatal to the repose and the rights of Mr. S's fellow-citizens, he will not find a single charge brought against any particular man or body of men, nor upon the people at large : It is there asserted, that the clergy suffered much from the paper currency ; that many of them were exposed to great difficulty from a delay of payment of their salaries, and that it was not right for people to be judges in their own cause, and to turn out the faithful servant of many years, to poverty and want. Instead of charging the people at large with thinking that they could be emancipated from the bonds of justice, he asserted only that "in some places at least," they appeared to have done so. A saving clause of the same kind is added in every place where any of those things which Mr. S. calls charges, are mentioned ; the reader of the pamphlet will doubtless observe this, for it was done with a design to avoid giving offence, as well as to keep at a distance from every thing personal.

But what will the world think of the candour and sincerity of Mr. S. when they find him, in so many words, acknowledging the truth of both the facts above asserted. Hear him saying (p. 7.) "When the country suffered under the oppression of paper money, they (i. e. the clergy) became peculiar sufferers" : Again (p. 9.) "The other complaint, that the salaries due are a long time out before payment is made, I believe hath some foundation, and that the Ministers are great sufferers by it : " Here Mr. J. S. a Layman. himself acknowledges the truth of the representation made by Mr. Thacher ; and was it so great a crime for a simple clergyman to *tell his tale of woe*, to call upon those around him to *think* upon this subject, to beg some abler head to point out a remedy ! Surely Mr. S. must have lived in some place where the people have been peculiarly backward in doing their duty to their minister, that he feels himself so much "injured" by a representation founded (as he acknowledges in fact, and that he should take up the pen, and rescue his countrymen from a charge,

charge, which, by the way, was never made upon them, but which he cannot deny to be true in many respects.

Mr. S. urges some things in extenuation of these charges, as he calls them: He tells us, "that there was not a single town or parish *where the minister stood well with his people*, but made grant after grant, to supply deficiencies happening by the depreciation; but still before the money could possibly be collected, the rapid depreciation of the currency laid a foundation for a future demand:" that "he had often been astonished to see the people borne down with taxes, suffering themselves by being obliged to receive their own debts in paper money upon a par; yet voluntarily, in every town, making grants to their ministers."

It is very possible that the people in every parish (who did not happen to be offended with their ministers) made them grants in paper money: It is very true, that before they received this, or it was collected, it depreciated so much as to be inadequate to the purposes for which it was granted; and, it is very likely that a man who lived well with his own money, should be "astonished" at the generosity of others: There are efforts of liberality, justice and goodness which astonish some persons: Whether this arises from an incapacity in them readily to take in ideas so far above them, or whether their apprehensions that the exercise of these principles towards the clergy, may add too much ability to a dangerous set of men (who, by the way, if they did not happen "to stand well with their people," were obliged to take up with a nominal sum) are questions which we are not now called to determine.

Happy is the author of the Observations, when he finds himself agreeing with Mr. J. S. and supported in his opinion by so able a writer: What satisfaction did it give him when he found this gentleman falling in with his sentiments, and saying, with his usual candour; "after all it is to be confessed, that justice was not done them" (p. 7.): And, if "justice was not done them," what iniquity was it for one of their number to make a representation which he thought might lead those upon whom they depended, under God, for their daily bread, to do them now that justice which before had not been

been done them, of whom he at the same time expresses so good an opinion, as to suppose that it was owing to inattention, that the complaint had taken place (obs. p. 7, 8.) : Is it an "high charge" for a man or set of men, who "have not had justice done them," to speak of it, to apply to those who are capable of doing them justice, and to beg of them that they would do it? Is Mr. S. desirous of preventing even the voice of complaint from reaching his ears? Is he of such exquisite sensibility, as that the sight of misery disgusts him? The author of the Observations will assure him that he had no idea of disturbing his repose, or of exciting in him or any other man such a disquietude, as he appears, from his Strictures, to feel.

Mr. Thacher would beg leave to ask Mr. S. whether he supposes that the greater part of those who contributed to the support of the clergy in the late times, "suffered by being obliged to receive their own debts in paper money, upon a par?" Were creditors more numerous than debtors at that time?

Mr. S. mentions as a reason for that delay of payment to the clergy which he acknowledges to have some foundation, the great increase of public burthens; possibly the clergy, without being influenced by the threatening p. 9 and 10 of the Strictures, are as ready to make allowance on this consideration as any other set of men: where their people are not able to support them, perhaps they are as ready to yield their services for a scanty or, for no compensation, as either of the *learned* professions! but it happens unfortunately for them that they are obliged to eat, drink and be clothed; they must maintain their families (if they have been so wicked as to bring such an additional charge upon their people) and if, in consequence of the public burthens, they should have nothing to support them, they must suffer very greatly, and possibly starve; *when*, some imprudent writer of observations might again grate the ears and disturb the repose of Mr. S. with an "high charge" founded in justice.

The clergy are doubtless much obliged to Mr. S. for his polite insinuations p. 5 and 6 that their political conduct was dictated by an apprehension of episcopacy's being introduced
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and their livings being taken from them : be it known to Mr. S. and the world, that the author of the Observations scorns the insinuation ! He will not say (for he doth not believe) that it originated from a baseness of heart, but he will say, that he believes the heat of argument drew from him a sentiment which his cooler moments will disapprove.

Mr. S. tells us that there were "some clergymen" in the state "who were enemies to the people" and was there any order of men who had not some of this character among them ? Because some of the *gentlemen of the Law*, for instance, were in this predicament, ought the whole of that *respectable body*, (a great majority of whom are supposed to act a directly contrary part) to be deprived of their honest reputation on account of the faults of a few ? Doth Mr. S. well then in enlarging with such a "fund of pathos" on this subject ?

Mr. Thather, in his Observations, mentioned the decline of religion or made use of the phrase, "as the spirit of religion declined : " this likewise hath grieved and sorely vexed Mr. S. his heart ponders upon the subject and his pen obeys its dictates : he considers it as an "high charge against his countrymen" he doth not believe it :—He assures us that we have as much religion as ever we had, only not so much "formality, affectation and hypocrisy : " and proves that we have as much religion in New-England as we were wont to have, because "science extends itself, the arts are more attended to, humanity is become a cardinal virtue among the nations, and wars civil or national are not conducted with so much ferocity as they have heretofore been.

There may be some men, who are by no means enthusiasts and yet may doubt the certainty of Mr. S's conclusions : men at as great a distance from "formality, affectation or hypocrisy," as this worthy gentleman himself, may suppose that religion consists in something more than science or even humanity, good as they may be in themselves. The decay of religion is a matter of real lamentation to many good men among us ; it is frequently observed in the most public manner, without reprehension or reply ; which is right as to this fact Mr. S. or I, must be left to be determined by experience and the consciences of the people.

Mr.

Mr. S. must certainly be an honest man for he cannot help owning the truth ; he acknowledges that " ceasing to feel a proper attachment to the ministers of the gospel will be an evidence of the decline of vital piety in the land" p. 4. It seems therefore that we agree in making an indifference to the ministry an evidence of want of piety and goodness, and the world must judge whether this evidence now exists among this people ?

Another phrase unhappily dropt from the pen of the author of the observations ; he mentioned the words "scanty pittance" ; this again offends Mr. S. his veins thrill with *virtuous* resentment. He informs us how well the clergy used to live before the war ; he tells us how much they used to have, he gives us to understand that they send as many or more sons to college than other persons : He comforts his own heart by reflecting upon Mr. Eliot, Mr. Clark, &c. who being settled since the war, have more salaries than they were wont to have : I am not *disposed* to contradict his assertions, but could wish him to look over his catalogue (if not his computation) once more, he will then find that one of them at least was settled before the war : Happy I am in the generosity of the people with whom these gentlemen are connected and could wish their example to universally followed. Mr. S. tells us "that he has had occasion to know as much about it as any man in the State : " He is asked therefore, in serious earnest, whether he thinks the phrase, "scanty pittance" may not be applied to many, if not most of the salary's of the present clergy ? whether he doth not think money to be less valuable or that it requires more of it to support a family now than before the war ? and, whether he deems the clergy of New-England to be in a rich and flourishing state, such a state as warrants no complaint and requires no redress ?

The author of the Observations when he used this phrase which appears to be so obnoxious to Mr. S. had no thought of exciting any one's irascible sensations, or of putting the people on increasing the salaries of their ministers : the subject cannot be more disagreeable to Mr. S. than it is to Mr. Thacher : he cordially wishes (and he doubts not but his brethren

brethren will join in the wish) that he was in such a situation as not to increase the burdens of his people by supporting him, but that he could serve them for nought : it hath pleased God to order it otherwise, and he must submit.—But Mr. S. had no occasion for the bitterness which in speaking of this matter, he expresses (p. 9.) for this is a point which lies in the breasts of the people alone, they must judge and determine in this case ; their ministers are dependant upon them. If, with Mr. S. they should look back with astonishment upon the munificent grants which they made them in paper money, it is highly probable, that they will not hold themselves bound by justice and generosity, to do any thing more for them : And it seems, upon the doctrine of Mr. S. if they are disposed to withdraw the whole of their support, they may lawfully do so.

There is a kind of electric fluid in some particular words, which, used at some particular periods, have an amazing effect upon the nerves of those who hear them : Unfortunately, the author of the Observations happened to fall on some of these words ; and as unfortunately, Mr. S's nerves happened to be in such a state as to catch the flame. In addition to the phrases abovementioned, Mr. Thacher happened to mention "the fathers of New-England ;" whether they were tolerant or intolerant, whether they were right or wrong in persecuting their neighbours, or excluding all but church-members from the freedom of their company, was not said—but instantly Mr. S. is led to comment upon this hackneyed subject ; he calls upon Mr. Thacher to prove "that they abhorred persecution as much as he suggests they did ;" now, if Mr. S. will examine the pamphlet again, he will find that Mr. Thacher suggests nothing about it. He abhors persecution as much as any man : He despises the connection made between priests (if applied to the clergy of New-England) and hanging, broiling and burning," by Mr. S. in his 2^d page : He assures Mr. S. that if he meant hereby to insinuate that a disposition to persecute their neighbours prevailed or existed among the clergy of New-England, he was guilty of a vile misrepresentation, and if he did it merely to strengthen his
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opinion in the mind of a weak or inattentive reader, he did not act the part of a fair disputant.

Much hath been said by some writers of a late day (Mr. S. is congratulated on his coadjutors) with respect to the intolerance of our fathers! These writers forget that persecution was deemed lawful by all sects at that day, and was practised, more or less, by every one of them, as they had opportunity. This, though it does not *justify* the conduct of our fathers, yet may serve to *extenuate* their fault, and take off some of those black traits, with which their portrait is drawn by Mr. S. and some other limners. But, neither Mr. S. nor his associates, need much to alarm themselves; for should their doctrines prevail, we should soon see an end of all the institutions of these venerable men, and feel ourselves emancipated from their costly and needless appointments; the halcyon days would arrive, when every man may do that which is *right in his own eyes*, with respect to religion, learning or morality, and thus the most *complete liberty* may take place.

What led Mr. S. to suppose that the author of the pamphlet he censures, wished to acquire "new powers" to the clergy, he is at a loss to imagine. If he expressed himself as he thought (and the reader of the pamphlet is left to judge for himself) he disclaimed every idea of independence in the clergy, and "reprobated" every imagination to the contrary. What more Mr. J. S. would have, or how Mr. Thacher could more plainly have expressed his sentiments upon this subject, than he hath done in that pamphlet, he is at a loss to conceive.

A doubt hath arisen in the minds of some on reading the *Sirictures*, whether Mr. S. had ever read the pamphlet he answers throughout: His so totally mistaking the design of the author, his inattention to parts of the pamphlet, plain in themselves, and calculated to throw light upon other parts, appear to give greater force to these doubts: They must be confirmed, when we take notice that Mr. S. hath, once and again, quoted and commented upon an expression which the author of the *Observations* never used. Mr. S. (if it will not affect him

him too disagreeably) is desired again to look over that pamphlet, and he will no where find the expression "turned out to graze :". If he looks into his own *Strictures*, he will find this expression quoted from the pamphlet, and commented upon !! p. 13, 24. Charity forbids the person injured to suppose, that this was a wilful mistake, designed to impose upon an unwary reader ; it requires him to believe, that it was owing to the gentleman's having never read the pamphlet he answers with care and caution : and at the same time duty demands from him, to admonish Mr. S. of his fault, and to charge him, the next time he answers a book to be sure to *read* it, and not to quote expressions as from it, which he had either coined himself or picked up elsewhere. Indeed, there is a complexion running through all the latter part of the *Strictures* which lead "some at least" (Mr. S. will not suppose I am charging the people at large now) to conjecture, that they were prepared beforehand and wanted only some occasion to be introduced to the world : two reasons serve to support this opinion, one is, that the pamphlet was too insignificant in itself to deserve the reprehension or excite the alarms of Mr. S. and the other (perhaps a little more conclusive) arises from the total silence and neglect with which the main object of the *Strictures* in the pamphlet, and the whole argument on which they are founded are treated by Mr. S. Now, it would be the height of vanity in the author of the pamphlet to suppose that a man so ingenious as Mr. S. could not have answered it, or that he knew it to be so thorny as to render it unfit to be meddled with : he is constrained therefore to suppose that in his haste to write the *Strictures* (*strictures upon strictures.*) Mr. S. forgot to read the *Observations* which occasioned them.

The foundation of Mr. Thacher's arguments and descriptions in his pamphlet was, the flagrant injustice of any man, or body of men's being judges in their own cause ; the iniquity of one party's dissolving a solemn contract to the prejudice of the other without the intervention of indifferent men ; and the cruelty of depriving of his support, an aged and faithful servant, who had deserved well at the hands of his people.

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These points were not attempted to be proved by civil or municipal law, by the platform of church discipline or the opinions of Mr. Cotton or Mr. Davenport, but by those plain principles of common sense and reason, of which every man must be a judge, and which vastly exceed any human institutions, be they ever so excellent.

I have read the *Strictures* upon this pamphlet more than once and again, with great attention and care, and for my life I cannot discover any reply to, or *strictures* upon, the arguments or descriptions arising from this source: much is said upon civil and municipal law, upon the third article in the bill of rights, and other matters, but the gentleman no where shews us the equity of a man's judging in his own cause, or the propriety of casting off an helpless old servant, when we want him no longer.

Mr. S. indeed gives us a history of all the instances wherein the power of dismissing their minister hath been exercised, beginning with Bolton, the inhabitants of which town will doubtless be much obliged to Mr. S. for the high character he gives them; he enlarges upon the characters of the several ministers, upon whom this power was exercised; he hints that they were some of them tories and became obnoxious to their people upon this account; he enlarges with "a fund of pathos" upon the subject and gives us a number of anecdotes which discover his great knowledge of living and dead characters, as well as his readiness to draw their pictures.

The writer of these pages hath no disposition to follow Mr. S. through these disquisitions; in this part of an author's qualifications (as well in many others) he cheerfully yields the palm to Mr. S. He means only to observe upon all these particulars, that by this account itself Mr. Thacher was justified in saying that the doctrine he opposed was become fashionable with *many*—that this could not be the doctrine or the practice of the first churches of New-England, seeing it was so lately introduced---that tories, be they what they may, are entitled to justice as well as other persons---and that, should we allow (which may admit of much doubt) that this power hath hitherto been used to good purposes, it would not follow
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that it is not usurped or that it may not hereafter be abused; for tyranny and usurpation are generally mild and modest at their first appearance; they mean to get established and then they discover what they really are. So much only is said in reply to the instances Mr. S. hath brought, because none of them disprove either of the great points beforementioned, upon which the arguments in Mr. Thacher's pamphlet were founded; the clergymen now living to whom reference is had in the strictures must defend themselves: as to the dead (indeed it is not manly to attack them) they must be left to the day *when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed.*

Mr. S. in his 12th page suggests the idea that the person whom he opposes was under the extraordinary influence of fear, which might render him incapable of drawing "right consequences:" he is not conscious of being more under the influence of this uncomfortable passion than his neighbours, he hath full confidence in the justice and generosity of the people with whom he is connected and will not doubt them: but, if he doth not greatly misunderstand the consequences of Mr. S's opinion, there is (should it take place) sufficient reason for alarm in the mind of every clergyman in the commonwealth. No man is exempted from the calamity of sickness, nor, doth he live long enough, from the debility of old age: either of these may operate to prevent a clergyman from performing with his wonted life and spirit the public duties of his function: this may be deemed by some (Mr. S. is asked whether in his catalogue of instances of dismissal he did not pass by a late one similar to this) a sufficient reason for a minister's dismissal from his people. Mr. S. may be the father of a family---let him put himself in the place of a clergyman thus circumstanced: religion may teach him resignation to the will of heaven; fortitude as a man may enable him to bear *his own* calamities; but what must the feelings of the parent be when he sees his children "hungering for that morsel" which he cannot give them! what must be the yearnings of parental bowels, when he views the calamity, the hunger and nakedness of his children and knows himself unable to relieve them! Gracious heaven!--but I drop the curtain! may the Almighty preserve

preserve Mr. S. and all my fellow citizens from a situation excruciating like this ! but to return,

The author of the strictures charges me with want of precision, because, in the observations, there is no distinction made between the pastor of the church and the teacher of religion and morality to the parish. I must ask Mr. S's pardon and frankly acknowledge my total ignorance, that such a distinction ever subsisted : never did it enter my head or my heart till the strictures shone upon me ; now, it is very possible that such a distinction may subsist without my being acquainted with it, but there may be others in the same unhappy predicament : it could have been wished therefore that Mr. S. had pointed out to us benighted mortals---the place where our ecclesiastical constitution (if we have any) knows any minister of religion but as pastor of a church---whether a man regularly dismissed by his church was ever heretofore or till this day considered as connected with his people ? whether the laws of the commonwealth which make so material an alteration in the standing of our ministers and the state of our churches were ever promulgated ? what difference it makes in the justice and equity of the thing, whether a contract is dissolved and judgment passed in their own cause, by a church or a parish ? and finally whether, when the pastor of the church hath nothing to eat, the teacher of religion and morality (being the same person) will not starve ? No doubt can be entertained but that a person who hath discovered such a fund of knowledge as the author of the strictures, can, with "precision," answer all these questions and clear all these difficulties.

The sentiments thrown out in the Strictures upon the supremacy of our churches (allowing them to be ever so true) will never prove that they have a right to do wrong, to contradict the first principles of natural and revealed religion or to infringe the sacred rules of justice and equity : they are not therefore strictures upon, or answers to, Mr. Thacher's pamphlet, they were probably prepared for the castigation of some other offender.

There are some observations in the Strictures which relate to the nature of different societies, and to the civil and municipa

pal law ; these, it is humbly conceived, do not affect the point in question ; they belong to some other piece, and not to the pamphlet which originated the present controversy---they do not prove (*hic murus abeneus esto !*) that it is right for a man or body of men to judge in their own cause, or that a contract ought to be dissolved at the pleasure of one party (be it church or parish it matters not an ace) to the prejudice of the other. When these points are proved, then the observations will be answered, but never before.

It was a great satisfaction to the author to be informed, that his sentiments with respect to the tenure by which a minister holds his office, and the necessity of the interposition of an ecclesiastical body to judge between, before a minister can be dismissed from his people, have been publicly and solemnly declared to be a part of the laws of the land, by the supreme, judicial authority in this commonwealth. Whether the steady shining of these lights of our country will tend to eclipse Mr. S. and some other eccentric luminaries among us, time must determine. Mr. S. labours much to prove, that a minister is tried by his peers, when his cause relating to a difference between him and his people, is tried by a common jury returned as in all other causes : there need but one question to be asked, in order to lead every man to judge upon what Mr. S. hath said with respect to this matter.--Would any people suppose their cause of this kind fairly tried, which was to be determined by a jury consisting entirely of ministers ? By no means ---Why ? not because they doubt their integrity or judgment, but because they would suppose that ministers would feel themselves liable to be in the same situation with the person tried and would therefore be biased to give the cause in his favour, in order that they themselves might afterwards reap benefit from the precedent---and doth not the same idea hold good of a jury consisting entirely of laymen ; *they may* be in the same situation with the people whom they try, and therefore may wish to support them.

Mr. Thacher hath as good an opinion of his fellow-citizens as Mr. S. or any person, but he knows that interest is apt to warp the soundest judgment, and that prejudice may mislead the best heart : There is magic in the sound of the supremacy

premac^y of the people, and being delivered from priestcraft and ecclesiastical tyranny, such a magic as may possibly draw aside honest, good men from the paths of rectitude and mercy. Should a jury be told with "a fund of pathos," with the most rapid and engaging eloquence by a person whose opinions they have been wont to respect. "You have no ecclesiastical constitution---your ministers are your hired servants---you may cease to employ and to pay them when you please---*You* are absolute and supreme in judging upon this case, and may dismiss them at any hour:" Should a jury ever hereafter be told this, it might possibly mislead them a little.

The clergy, I suppose, considered themselves as citizens of the commonwealth when the frame of government was made; they expected that their rights were guarded in it as well as those of other men; they wished for no *greater* security to be granted to them than was granted to others, but they expected *as much*; they did not suppose that they were placed in the power of their people more by this frame of government than they were by the ecclesiastical constitution of their churches; they did not suppose that there would be such a total change in the system of their church government as Mr. S. hath suggested; neither had this gentleman himself ideas of this nature at that time, unless I am much mistaken.

The cool and dispassionate reader is desired to ask himself, what appeared to be the object of Mr. Thacher in his Observations? did he discover the least wish to have the powers or jurisdiction of the clergy increased? did he ask the interposition of the civil authority to enlarge their livings, or oblige all men to conform to their sentiments? Had he done this, he would have merited the unhand^some insinuation of Mr. S. (the gentleman must excuse me) in p. 25 and other places of the Strictures: on the contrary, The clergy wish and desire (and the author hath some knowledge of them) only to be upon a par with other orders of men in the community, only to be secured from poverty and want, when old age overtakes them, and not to be stigmatized as the only men in the commonwealth with whom a contract may be lawfully

lawfully broken : and they have too much confidence in the justice and generosity of their countrymen to believe, that they will ever suffer this to be done under the forms of law. Mr. S. may write and plead, the enemies of the institution of our fathers may unite their force, but in God and my countrymen I trust, they will never be able to establish *this iniquity by a law.*

Mr. S. is thanked for the *delicate* manner in which he speaks of the "*wages*" of the clergy in his pamphlet and is desired to determine whether, in his opinion, a clergyman grown old and unfit for service and on this account dismissed by his people, hath a right to be maintained in the alms house of a town, in common with the rest of its poor ? The law used to oblige masters to maintain their servants ; it is yet uncertain to some how far it is altered ; it may not be improper therefore to ask Mr. S. whether the parish of which he was minister, or the town of which he was an inhabitant are obliged to maintain the said aged, dismissed, helpless minister ?

The hint with respect to a synod of the churches which was thrown out in the Observations appears to have made a deep impression upon Mr. S. once and again he mentions it ; he informs us what they can and what they cannot do ; he views them as a very impotent body, and yet he seems to have some apprehension upon his mind about them, otherwise he would not have enlarged so much upon this subject.

Perhaps a clergyman whose studies and habits of life have led him constantly to attend to subjects of this nature may be able to determine what a synod can do as well as Mr. S. they may determine what they suppose to be agreeable to the gospel with respect to the discipline of their churches ; they may agree to lay this before their constituents, if it is adopted by them, they may agree to practice it. It is very true that they have no coercive measures wherewith to compel men to submit to their opinions ; they want none such, but they may agree to withhold acts of communion and fellowship from such churches as refuse to submit to what they may deem the order of the gospel : all sects have some bond of union which unite them together ; they have some common method of communicating their sentiments and affording each other mutual assistance in things of religion ; few of them possess any coercive powers, and they do better without than with them, for I seriously believe that force is of no benefit in religion.

But that which appears to affect Mr. S. most sensibly as to this synod is, his fear about "it's having authority over the money of the citizens," its affecting their property:" Mr. S. may lay aside his disquietude upon this score---his money shall be safe---his purse shall not be invaded. No one had an idea of the kind, and had not this "*root of all evil*" run too much in his head perhaps he would not have felt such a degree of anxiety about this "reverend, respectable congregation of speculators."

But there is a way to prevent this formidable body from doing mischief; we will drag Mr. S. from that obscurity where his modest merit hath placed him. He shall sit in this body, he shall be invested with the powers of a tribune of the people among the ancient Romans, and as soon as any thing is moved or like to take place which may affect his property or that of any of his fellow citizens, he shall with his omnipotent *veto* put a stop to the evil, and guard against the danger.

This unfortunate synod (which by the way may never have existence, tho' no man hath a right to forbid the churches of Christ to assemble by their representatives to consult or advise about their own affairs) hath been guilty of another evil: while Mr. S. is regulating the mode of its procedure (we thank the gentleman for his assistance) he throws out some observations which may be attended with consequences whereof he is not aware, for fear renders some men "quite incapable of drawing right consequences." His idea seems to be that religion is so, in such a sense a personal thing as that a majority ought not to govern in any religious society. It is true that no person can be bound to do that which is sinful, that which his conscience forbids because a majority of these with whom he is connected have determined to do so, because no man can be bound to sin: But this is not more true of religious than it is of civil societies: to suppose that a man ought not to conform to the sentiments of his brethren in things indifferent because the society which unites then is of a religious nature, is to say that no such society shall ever exist, because the sentiments of a majority must govern in every society or it will in time cease to be such; mankind are so constituted as that they seldom agree to think or act alike in every respect for any length of time. There is not a religious *society* upon earth, if every member is obliged

to refuse his consent to what he deems indifferent or not sinful because religion is a personal thing.

It may be worth enquiry, whether an ecclesiastical council called by a church to ordain a pastor over them, which act of their's *used* to be deemed necessary to his regular introduction to his office, are not exposed to Mr. S's anathema p. 28. whether their acts on this occasion are not "infringements on the right of trials by jury, and against the constitution" for their act hath some distant relation at least to touching the property of the people.

But if we give up this point as being entirely of an ecclesiastical nature, what shall we say of those wicked, tyrannical infringing councils who have set in one place and another, who have judged between the people and their ministers, and have sometimes brought in results which materially affected their property? they have most certainly incurred the censure of Mr. S. and invaded the rights of their fellow citizens in a most signal manner.

Mr. S. is reminded that ecclesiastical councils always consist of at least as many (and often more) laymen than ministers: the latter never complains of this mode of trial, if a council is mutually chosen; but this method will not be effectual in Mr. S's opinion, because "there would be no certainty or very great probability of their agreeing". Now, mutual councils have been known in this country from its first settlement, they have been frequently applied to in circumstances of difficulty; instead of their *seldom* agreeing they much more seldom disagree, and they have often been the means of restoring peace and harmony to divided churches and towns. If therefore Mr. S. *means* or *wishes* to demolish these and every other ecclesiastical jurisdiction, he must find reasons for their abolition which are founded in fact.

I know not but that I mistake the consequences of Mr. S's doctrine in his pamphlet; but they appear to me to be these: There can be no such thing as a religious society, for religion is a personal thing, and therefore not capable of being carried into society, or governed by those rules which bind all other bodies: The churches of Christ in New-Eng-

land have always acted a tyrannical part, and infringed upon the rights of the people because they have led in the choice of ministers to them : Our platform of church discipline and other ecclesiastical constitutions are nugatory and vain, because they were formed in synods which had a right only to speculate, and which voted by a majority, and that no ecclesiastical council hath a right to pass any decree which may in the most distant degree affect the propriety of the people, and that all who do so, are guilty " of infringements on the rights of trials by jury" and act " against the constitution." I mean not to misrepresent Mr. S. or any other man in the least degree; every one of these sentiments, I believe, to be either plainly expressed or fairly implied in his pamphlet : whether they are or no the reader will judge.

Upon Mr. S's principles our churches are all at uncertainty ; their past conduct hath been notoriously wrong because it was an high invasion upon the rights of the people for them to claim or to exercise a negative upon their choice of a minister ; councils are either nugatory or oppressive things : In short, we are totally wrong ! how ardently should we wish then for the publication of Mr. S's code of ecclesiastical polity, which may secure us from error and prevent us from invading the rights of our fellow subjects.

It is very probable that the idea which hath been to this day entertained of the necessity of the concurrence of the church, with a society, in the choice of a minister, arose from the same want of precision with which the author of the *Strictures* charges Mr. Thacher : from the foundation of the country its teachers have been known as the ministers of Jesus Christ, obliged to teach his religion and conform themselves, in every part of their conduct, to the rules and directions which he hath laid down in his gospel : whether it would be of advantage to have a set of ministers without those restraints; or teachers of any other system of religion and morality than the christian, the people must judge for themselves.

There is a hint thrown out in some part of the *Strictures*, as if Mr. Thacher was *not alone* in his publication, and that this idea may be of disadvantage to the clergy in general ; it is but justice for him therefore to declare, that he was so far
that

alone in the matter as that none of them were consulted in that publication : let the censure fall where it belongs ! no person hath a right to the least part of it but the author himself : He is sensible that his thus offering himself as a volunteer, at his age and standing, in the cause of the clergy, requires an apology to them ; he now makes it—perhaps it was forward and officious in him to publish his sentiments to the world ; perhaps his ignorance, his warmth or inattention, may have led him to injure the cause which he meant to serve, but his fathers and brethren, now assured that his motives were to endeavour to alleviate the calamities of those whom he loved, and to prevent injustice from taking place, will, he is certain, *forgive him this wrong.*

When Mr. S. can prove (to express the leading sentiments of the observations at one view, and repeat the substance of both pamphlets) that any man or body of men (be they church or parish) have a right to judge in their own cause, “in the first and in the last place, without an appeal and without a check”—when he can demonstrate that the people may, consistent with justice and equity, turn away an aged and faithful servant to poverty and want—when he can shew that one party to a solemn contract, may dissolve it, at his or their pleasure, to the ruin of the other—that a man is tried by his peers, whose case is determined by those, whose interest it is to cast him—that the distinction which he hath made between the pastor of the church and the teacher of religion and morality is known in our ecclesiastical constitution, and by the laws of the land—that any ecclesiastical, civil or municipal law, can abrogate the great command of the gospel, *do to others as ye would that they should do to you*—and that the clergy of New-England are now in a thriving and flourishing state—when he can prove these things, he will have no antagonist, and will merit much from the community.

It would be unpardonable for the author to conclude this reply without acknowledging, in the sincerity of his heart, the politeness of Mr. S. in the character which, in the beginning of the Strictures, he hath given of him. This appears more like the kind partiality of a friend, than the observations of a literary antagonist. Had Mr. S. obliged the public with

with his name, there is no doubt but that this compliment might, with much more propriety, be returned. The writer is happy in declaring that his heart is a stranger to any bitterness or animosity towards Mr. S. be he whom he may, and were he conscious of having, in these pages, discovered any gall, or did he think that their perusal would wound the feelings of one good man, he would instantly commit them to the flames.

Fully engaged in performing the duties of an office which he prefers to every other and averts from his natural inclination and temper, to litigation, the author means not to continue the controversy. When Mr. S. shall prove the points above suggested, he will have no competitor. If he deems this a victory, he is welcome to its sweets, and is cordially congratulated on his triumph.

The author takes leave of Mr. S. and the public, with sincerely wishing them every civil and religious blessing, with assuring them, that his heart warms when he reflects upon the state of freedom and happiness which God hath bestowed upon them; and that, instead of desiring to infringe upon the rights of one individual of the community, he would defend the least of them with the utmost exertion of his poor abilities.



F I N I S.

Erratum. p. 15. l. 23 from bot. for *county* read *country*.